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Background

To participate in the global conversation on combating climate change, Japanese university students need to be able to utilize their English language presentation skills across a range of contexts. However, for most students, their experience presenting in English is typically limited to the classroom. Therefore, this study seeks to enhance the voice of Japanese university students by first analyzing a series of recent speeches by Swedish climate-change activist Greta Thunberg. The research design in this study consisted of two phases. Initially, a structural analysis of her speeches was conducted, exploring the use of positive and negative message framing techniques. Secondly, an examination of the persuasive discursive techniques used in her speeches was conducted, focusing on established rhetorical devices.

Methodology

The key research question framing this study is: What are the messaging framing approaches and the persuasive discursive techniques utilized by Greta Thunberg to enhance her climate change speeches? Transcripts of six of Greta Thunberg's speeches were processed and thematically coded manually by the researcher through MAXQDA 2020 software.

Useful references

- Bertolotti, M., & Catellani, P. (2014). Effects of message framing in policy communication on climate change. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(5), 474-486.
- Lucas, S. (2015). *The art of public speaking* (12th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Thunberg, G. (2019). *No one is too small to make a difference*. Milton Keynes, UK: Penguin Random House.

Message framing approaches

- **Positive framing:** emphasizing potential future gains and benefits to be had by combating climate change
- **Negative framing:** emphasizing the disastrous future consequences and impending problematic issues that will arise from not combatting climate change

Key techniques

- **Bookending:** Repeating the same word(s) at the beginning and end of a phrase.
“Nobody does it better than us, nobody.”
- **Contrasts:** Using simple opposites to generate attention.
“Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” - John F. Kennedy
- **Doubling:** Repeating a word for emphasis.
“This is a really, really good deal.”
- **Exclusive language:** Pronouns that separate the audience from the speaker. E.g., ‘you’ & ‘your’
- **Inclusive language:** Pronouns that include the audience. E.g., ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’
- **Knock-downs:** Building up opposing points and then successfully refuting them.
“Some people say this tablet is expensive, fragile, or has a small memory capacity. So, why is it the most popular tablet on the market? Let me tell you!”
- **Machine-gunning:** Making 6-8 points in a row to increase the overall impact of your message.
“Our new car is cheaper, faster, safer, roomier, more stylish, more efficient, and better designed...”
- **Personalizing:** Pronouns to highlight the speaker's position. E.g., ‘I’, ‘my’, & ‘mine’
- **Rhetorical questions:** Questions that are not intended to solicit and answer or that do not need to be answered.
- **Tripling:** The use of three similar words together, three points in a speech, three words in a phrase, or a phrase three times - also known as ‘the rule of three’
“We shall fight...” - Sir Winston Churchill
“This cake is light, delicious, and non-fattening.”
“I came, I saw, I conquered.” - Julius Caesar

Speeches

- “Our lives are in your hands” - Stockholm 2018
- “Almost everything is black & white” - London 2018
- “Unpopular” - Katowice 2018
- “A strange world” - Berlin 2019
- “Wherever I go, I seem to be surrounded by fairytales” - Washington 2019
- “The world is waking up” - New York 2019

Findings

- ✓ Thunberg relied heavily on negative framing in all six of her speeches
- ✓ Thunberg utilized PDTs throughout her speeches (49-122 times)
- ✓ The most commonly used techniques were inclusive language (140x), exclusive language (82x), and personalizing (70x)
- ✓ Repetitive techniques were used in all her speeches

Implications

All of the techniques employed by Thunberg are easy to use and could serve to enhance the presentations of our students.

